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SUBJECT: PATRIARCH'S PROPOSAL FOR RESTORATION OF GEORGIA'S
CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY RECEIVES RESPECTFUL RESPONSE

¶1. Summary: In a sermon on October 7, Georgian Patriarch Ilia II suggested a constitutional monarchy for Georgia. The proposal was welcomed by many opposition parties in Georgia. His proposal echoes other ideas circulated by the opposition for a "parliamentary republic", without a presidency. The ruling National Movement party did not reject the idea outright, but spokesmen commented that it is too early to consider it. We believe the Patriarch's wish is unlikely to be fulfilled. However, the response to his idea indicates both the respect in which the Patriarch is held and that the opposition's intense dislike for President Saakashvili has made them willing to seriously consider the abolition of the office of the Presidency altogether. End summary.

¶2. Addressing the congregation at the Trinity Cathedral in Tbilisi on October 7, the Patriarch proposed an initiative to establish a constitutional monarchy in Georgia. According to the Patriarch "very often other states dictate to us what to do. Some tell us it (the government) should be a presidency and some say it should be a parliamentary republic. This is not up to others to decide." He recalled the reign of the Bagrationi dynasty, which was terminated in 1801 when Georgia was absorbed by Russia. Ilia suggested restoring the dynasty to the throne by choosing a person to become monarch from the Bagrationi family or even grooming someone for the job from childhood. The head of the Patriarch's press service, Archpriest Davit Sharashenidze, said that a constitutional monarchy would be "a guarantee of the protection of human rights, political stability and the unity of the nation."

¶3. The Patriarch's initiative was widely supported by the opposition, many of whom intensely dislike President Saakashvili and the leading role he plays in the current government. The New Rightist Party dedicated a press conference to the issue and circulated a declaration supporting the idea, based on "the experience of centuries-old history, taking into account dramatic events that took place in the country since independence was regained, having analyzed wide international practice and guided by the appeal of Ilia II."

¶4. The Patriarch's idea echoes calls heard in the demonstrations following Irakli Okruashvili's arrest for deposing President Saakashvili and establishing a "parliamentary republic". According to the Conservative Party's Zviad Dzidziguri, most of the opposition parties believe that Georgia "should have a parliamentary form of government and its perfect form is a constitutional monarchy." Labor party leader Shalva Natelashvili also held a press conference on October 8 to support the idea. The leader of the Freedom Party, Konstantine Gamsakhurdia, and the leader of Georgia's Way, Salome Zourabichvili, also gave positive assessments. According to them, a king is not a dictator. He is the guarantor of Georgian traditions, national spirit and national identity on the one hand, and of territorial integrity on the other. "I've always supported the idea of a constitutional monarchy as the right and most capable model for Georgia. I have also said that if I am elected a president, before we (the opposition alliance) began a movement with the slogan

Without President, I will not be a political leader, but a type of leader who supports and protects the rights of the people and guarantees protection of other democratic values," Zourabichvili said.

15. The ruling National Movement party did not reject the proposal outright, however its spokesmen said that it is too early to speak about modifying state governance when Georgia has two breakaway regions. An MP from the ruling party, Vakhtang Balavadze, said the issue should only be considered after the restoration of the country's territorial integrity. The same comment was made by one of the leaders of the National Movement, Giga Bokeria. He preferred to believe that the Patriarch's initiative refers to the future and not to the current situation.

16. Comment: The Georgian Orthodox Church and the Patriarch are well-respected and extremely influential in Georgia. Any idea the Patriarch puts forward must be seriously considered by any politician. The responses we report are couched to give due respect to the Patriarch's views. Nevertheless, in the end we consider a restoration of the Georgian monarchy extremely unlikely.

TEFFT